

a community called ...

The Copyright law of the United States (title 17, United States code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specific conditions is that the photocopy of reproduction is not to be "used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research." If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excess of "fair use," that user may be liable for copyright infringement. This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law.

By using this material, you are consenting to abide by this copyright policy. Any duplication, reproduction, or modification of this material without express written consent from Asbury Theological Seminary and/or the original publisher is prohibited.

© Asbury Theological Seminary 2011

THE GIFT OF POWER

BY
HENRY W. BENNETT, D.D.

But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is
come upon you.—ACTS i, 8.

NEW YORK: HUNT & EATON
CINCINNATI: CRANSTON & STOWE

1890

THE GIFT OF POWER.

“YE shall receive power.” This word “power” is a translation of the same word from which the expressive one “dynamite,” is derived. The kingdom of God shall come in power—dynamite. The power—dynamite—of the Lord was present. It is in the spiritual world what dynamite is in the material world. The truth may be preached, the word declared, the Bible read, and personal work performed; but if this power does not descend, nor accompany the work, nor touch the people, the arm of salvation is shortened.

This power is repeatedly promised. Its importance is emphasized. It is the one necessary gift which must precede any extensive work of grace. It is the energy of God by which miracles are wrought, truth is demonstrated, and revivals are promoted.

This supernatural energy is the prime need of our churches to-day. We have culture, orthodox preaching, excellent appointments, the best appliances ever possessed, and wealth, and members. Our need is a baptism of power. This power is by the Holy Ghost, is given by God, is from without, comes upon us, and is to be used in preaching the truth, promoting holiness, and saving souls. There were frequent displays of it in the apostolic period. It was this spiritual dynamite that caused the wide commotion, so vividly expressed as turning the world up-side down. It was this that promoted Christianity, and which seized the people as they listened to the word.

It is this which explains the wonderful success which has attended the preaching of the unlearned evangelists from Peter to Harrison. It is this which makes the difference in the preaching of the same sermon on different occasions: at one time with no effect, while at

another there are great results. In this is the reason why a poor sermon may be attended with good results, while a good sermon may awaken no interest.

The manifestations of this power are multifiform. There is, probably, an internal and invisible uniformity. At Pentecost the visible manifestations were the forked tongues of fire and the conduct of the apostles. The invisible were the sound and the fear which came upon every soul; and they were pricked in their hearts, and the result was they cried out, "What must I do to be saved?"

Its effects were boldness of speech, power in witnessing for Christ, and the salvation of souls. There are, accompanying these displays of power, some things which the people see, and hear, and feel. The Pentecostal scene is not exceptional in this regard. There were other displays of power, as recorded in the Acts, which had these attending witnesses, or incidents.

This power was not withdrawn after the last apostle had finished his ministry. The history of the Church abounds in incidents demonstrating this great truth. John Wesley describes a meeting in Fetter Lane, on January 1, 1739. About sixty were present. About three in the morning the power of God was felt by all. Many fell to the ground, and many cried out for exceeding joy.

His journals abound in descriptions of these visitations of power. While preaching himself, or aiding in religious services, men and women were overcome, became unconscious, sank down to the earth, or cried aloud for mercy. There were times when some auditor would leave the services in a furious passion. The word took hold, and men must reject it, and pass from bad to worse, or accept the truth and be saved. This was called "the power," and the evidences of its presence were deep conviction, genuine repentance, intense earnestness, and fruitful conversions.

Jonathan Edwards preached a sermon on the topic, "Sinners in the hands of an angry God." The excitement became intense. There was weeping, with crying and groaning; and some fell on their faces, and some clung to the pillars of the church. I have seen it estimated that five hundred were converted.

Dr. Stevens writes of the evangelist Abbott, "that his casual conversations, always religious, his social or domestic prayers, had the same effect. We continually read, not merely of God attending the word with the energy of the Holy Ghost, in such manner that numbers fell to the floor, that the wicked flew to the doors, that there was a shaking among the dry bones; but that, at his temporary lodging-places, in family prayer, the Lord was with him of a truth, and similar wonders attended him. Family groups bearing him in their carriages to their homes, from his meetings, were awakened, converted, sanctified; shouted the praises of God, lost their

strength or consciousness, as he conversed with them on the route." It is recorded "that the slain fell before him like dead men, . . . divers persons lay through the house as dead, a solemn awe set upon many faces. The house was filled with cries and praises to God; some trembled and were astonished."

These things seem extraordinary, and so men hasten to find some other cause for them than the power of God. But it is extraordinary and supernatural to some for God to be working in their consciences by the power of the Holy Spirit, convincing and converting them, and the unusual behavior is the most natural expectation. However, I do not emphasize the incidents; it is the thing itself for which I pray.

The Rev. Jacob Young, in his autobiography, relates that at one of the quarterly meetings in 1820 the evangelist Swayze was asked to preach after the love-feast. Several times

he refused, but finally consented. He took his text and began to preach. Suddenly he threw back his head, looked up to heaven, and exclaimed with a loud voice, "God help the emaciated Swayze once more." "The people were shocked, as if they had touched an electric wire. In a few moments they began to fall from their seats like men slain in battle," while "one hundred were stretched out on the cold ground, crying for mercy." Swayze stood weeping and shouting. The meeting continued for twenty-four hours, and over a hundred were converted.

Dr. Finney relates numerous cases, in his experience, of like exhibitions and manifestations of power. One incident of peculiar interest is the revival at Rome, N. Y., where the very atmosphere seemed to be pervaded with a revival spirit. Men felt it in their homes and about their business. They seemed impressed and afraid to speak. There was a solemn awe on the majority of faces. Visit-

ors felt it upon reaching the city, and had to make an effort to keep back the tears. Men's hearts were tender and easy to be entreated, and ready to listen to the persuasions of the cross.

This power, more than any one other thing, is now the imperative need of our ministry and people. Its possession by a minister would mightily increase the converting agency of his private and public labors.

It is related of Dr. Finney that he was so charged with this power that on one occasion he spoke a few words to a friend upon the subject of salvation, and they pierced like a sword. The result was a conversion. On another occasion an impertinent young man of skeptical tendencies had an interview with him, and one look sent the arrow to his heart, and he found no rest until he came to Dr. Finney as a seeker.

Experiences of this sort are too numerous for presentation here. The word of God, in
No. 243.

the hands of men endued with power, cuts, slays, convinces of sin, and leads to God.

Bishop Fowler relates an incident in the work at Springfield, Ill., which illustrates my thought. The spiritual condition of the church was at a low ebb. It was in the harvest season. One Sabbath evening, when only a small congregation was present, the pastor, who told these facts to the bishop, announced a prayer-meeting for sunrise on Monday, for a revival. He dismissed the audience and retired to the study to pray. He prayed until he felt an assurance that his prayer was answered. As the sun rose the church was crowded with people, and people were coming from far and near. The meeting began, and continued until eleven that night. Many souls were converted. The revival continued. People were convicted while the pastor was in prayer. This is also the power of God.

I have selected a few instances out of the many which I have marked for use, in my

reading, for the reason that they belong to these last one hundred years or so. They seem to me to clearly exhibit this gift of power. There is a tendency to undervalue this gift; to rationalize it out of our faith, and leave us to combat our adversary with developed resources only.

This matter is sometimes discussed as the doctrine of miracles. The tendency has been to admit the supernatural as a fact of the first century of Christianity; but then withdrawn, and now not necessary. We do not, thus, exalt sufficiently the Divine agency and power in the world. I feel that this is a weakness in the Church; it is a doubt of God's availability in a work where he is more interested than are we. We have no faith to claim a promise which declares that he is more willing to give the Holy Spirit than we are to give good gifts unto our children. Our enemies can, to their own satisfaction at least, meet us with argument, reason, research, his-

tory, science, rhetoric, and eloquence. Their hearts are too hard, or their environment is too invincible for our developed resources to impress. We need a balance of power. Just precisely our need is this supplement of Divine power.

We go and teach, and with amazing patience wait for the results. The Divine plan is for us to go and teach and preach, and for Him that hath all power to go with us. What we should expect is that this power will accompany us; that this power is God facing the sinner; and that sinner who is thus brought face to face with God has a sorry time in hiding his iniquity, or defying his Maker.

This gift of power is not the witness of the Spirit to our adoption or sanctification, but is an enduement for a special work of grace. It is not bestowed on a favored few, for God is no respecter of persons. But there are conditions upon which its outpouring depends.

Every incident I have examined and the lives of those workers who had it agree in a few things concerning this—such as a belief in this gift, consecration of life, and fasting and prayer for it. Somebody agonized for it, or many persons, with one accord, were in prayer for this special blessing. There were fastings, great travail for souls, long vigils of prayer, and a mighty faith. One man, the Rev. Wm. Bramwell, had the habit of praying not less than six hours a day. In the case of the Rev. Dr. Edwards's great meeting, some believers had "spent the whole night preceding that sermon in agonizing prayer." Pentecost was preceded by a ten days' prayer-meeting.

I have before me an account of a meeting conducted by J. S. Bitter, at Marion, O., in December, 1888. On Saturday the workers agreed to ask for fifty conversions on Sunday. Sunday services began with a love-feast. At every service the power was felt,

and when the day's work closed eighty-eight persons professed conversion.

I believe that the Church does not do enough knee-work. God will be inquired of concerning this thing. He will not hear the half-hearted prayer, he will not hear if we regard iniquity in our hearts. We must be in earnest. John Knox on his calloused knees, with a breaking heart, cried, "Give me Scotland or I die."

President Finney says, "After receiving these baptisms of the Spirit, I was quite willing to preach the Gospel. I had no hungering and thirsting for worldly amusements in any direction—nothing, it seems to me, could be put in competition to the worth of souls."

Thomas Harrison says, "I have asked God, and I believe him. There is the secret of power. There is the mesmerism—take it. There is the electricity—get it. There is the power to throw a spell over the congregation and make them do what you will. You may have it."

This is the way to this enduement of power.

In no other age has the Church equaled that of to-day in all the equipments and appliances of a material sort. We are in troublous times. The Church is in need of power. We must return to the age of power, to the days of supernaturalism, and to displays of Divine energy that will astonish and confound sinners, skeptics, and atheists.

No. 243.

